

**Historical view of Christianity in Bed with the World (James 4:4): From Constantine (313) to the Walmartization of Christians (2018).**



We Christians have the marvelous privilege of being salt and light to our generation by bringing the influences of Jesus Christ's sacrificial love and grace to others, both in our personal circles and to our nation as a whole. As I have noted, all too often Christianity has aligned herself with the world's socio/economic/politico (SEP) forces, and as a result has become a horrible witness to the Truth, grace, and love of Jesus Christ. Although in every generation there have been beautiful examples of Christians who reflect the values of Christ rather than the mammonism (wealth and power) of their culture, the majority of Christians in history have opted for the world rather than Jesus Christ, and in so doing have distorted the values and witness of the LORD. Let us not forget that Jesus has made a greater impact for good on the human race than any other person who has ever lived. Those who follow Him always bring His transcendent influences to those around them.

Perhaps an overview of Christian history can aid us in seeing how ugly Christianity becomes when it gets in bed with the world for SEP benefits.

1. Constantine, 313: Under Constantine, Christianity got in bed with Rome for SEP benefits. The church gained a great deal from this unholy marriage. She was outfitted with worldly wealth, power, and safety (no more persecution). However, by marrying the State, she quickly absorbed the ways of the State regarding religious observances as well as political activity. Not only did Christians fail to bring salt and light to their generation, they putrified much of Christianity.
2. The Crusades, 1100-1300: The period of the Crusades is an example of the horrific results when Christianity is subverted. Christianity to this day is viewed negatively by millions of individuals all around the world because of the horrendous activities of the Crusaders. Instead of living by the principles of salt and light, in the name of Christ many choose power, riches, politics, and security. The mentality of the Crusades also gave impetus for future colonization and the brutality by Christians of millions of people in the name of Christ under “Manifest Destiny.” The love and grace of Jesus Christ were morphed into atrocities by “Christian imperialism”—all driven by financial gain and power but sanctified by phrases like “we are God’s chosen and this is for your own good.”
3. Inquisitions, 1231-1834: Pope Gregory IX officially established heresy courts. Dominicans and Franciscans had papal authority to accuse, try, and punish heretics. Rumors were enough to merit punishment ranging from burning at the stake, drowning, or cutting out one’s tongue. Spain was known as the “sword of Rome” and the “hammer of heretics.” The hard repression of Protestants produced not only deaths in large numbers but imprisonments, excommunications, and exiles. Tomas de Torquemada burned an estimated 2,000 accused. He was also instrumental in the expulsion of Jews from Spain. What a ghastly example of what happens when Christians reject Christ’s maxim that His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36). What a lesson for today!
4. America, 1650-1861: Although Christian colonists started out humanly by using black labor only in the form of indentured servants (who worked alongside them in the fields and were given freedom after seven years), due to the temptation of SEP benefits laws for permanent racial enslavement were created. What a total rejection of unity of all men as taught by Christ and His apostles (Gal. 3:28), all because of the temptations of the benefits of the political/financial/social prosperity of the nation. Christians at this time had lower standards than Muslims—at least Muslims would free their slaves if their slaves became fellow Muslims. The same could not be said for Christians.
5. Nazi Germany, 1930-1940. During the period the majority of Christians thought it was better to go along with Hitler than to oppose him. At first, this seemed like a good arrangement because Hitler’s plans were thought to be financially and culturally better to Germany, but as time went on the church would learn a bitter lesson. By 1938, both Christmas and Easter would be cast into a nationalistic light to reflect Hitler’s goals through the “Germanization of Christianity.” Instead of choosing Christ, most Christians

opted for the good life of the people (Lebensart). To save its own skin, the German church was ready to bend its knee to Hitler rather than follow Jesus Christ.

6. Jim Crow culture, 1870-1960. During this period the majority of Christians aligned themselves with racist segregationists—segregation often taught at the will of God from pulpits in the South. Instead of following the New Testament example of the fundamental equality of all believers (Gal. 3:26-27), Christians choose to align themselves with hate-filled racists—all because of the security in status quo.
7. Consumer Christianity, 1950-2018. In this period we have the Walmartization of Christianity in which Christ was increasingly seen as the way to gain better health, more wealth, and prosperity—to make this life better. Instead of seeing Christ’s invitation to all to enter into His life, Christians had their own way of doing things and wanted Christ to come into their lives to make them better. It was no longer about learning theology, the Word of God, Bible doctrine, and sacrificially loving all others. It was no longer about picking up one’s cross and following Jesus. It was about consumer goods in the church with spiritual experience becoming the most favored commodity (of course, churches knew this and accommodated to this reality). Instead of Jesus Christ and sound doctrine being the issues in picking a local church, it was all about how far away from home, listening to an uplifting message, programs for spirituality, music, nurseries, and otherwise meeting the various needs of consumer Christianity. The church was little more than a social club inside a Walmart Superstore.
8. Modern Political Christianity, 1950-2018. Liberal Christians opted for a social gospel that watered down the gospel of Jesus Christ and neglected the need for vertical relationship with God while Conservative Christians opt for an individualistic Christianity that watered down social justice for the benefits of prosperity. During this period we have marriage of conservative Christianity with the Republican party as seen in the activities of Jerry Falwell. While I am a conservative and appreciate the activity of conservatives in many areas, it is always a serious error to marry Christianity with any political party as reflected in statements like “The go-along, get-along strategy is dead. No more engagement. We want a wedding ring, we want a ceremony, we want a consummation of the marriage.” I believe in many conservative principles, but the minute I marry my Christian faith with any political party is the day my faith will be hijacked and corrupted. This has always been the case and will always be the case. We cannot marry our faith to any political party without eventually having to compromise when the party compromises. We see this all of the time today as Christians condemn activities in one party and excuse the same activities in their party. Such activities demonstrate that a party has more influence on a person than Jesus Christ. Let us understand that the world is watching and paying attention to us. Are we first known as followers of Jesus with love and unwavering principles or are we known primarily as Republicans or Democrats always attacking our opponents? Human leaders will come and go and shift positions. Jesus never changes. His love and grace never waver.

It is always about following Jesus Christ. It is about us entering into His life and concerns. It is not about Him entering into our lives for our purposes. He did not tell any of His disciples that if they followed Him, they would gain health, wealth, or power in the world. Quite the opposite. However, what He did promise them was that if they denied themselves and followed Him, they would bring transcendent salt and light to the needy people around them. They would make a difference that would not be measured in terms of the world's wealth. By denying themselves, they would find true and abundant life in Him.

Consider how history could have been different. What if Christians did not marry Rome in 313, creating the Roman Church filled with superstitions, relics, and contributing to the fall of Roman Empire? What if Christians were not guilty of the horrendous Crusades—that horrible witness that still casts an ugly shadow over Christianity? What if there were no inquisitions? What if the colonists did not succumb to financial temptations and embraced the full humanity and dignity of Native Americans and Blacks? What if they decided to trust God for provisions? What if Christians in Germany took up the Cross of Jesus rather than bowing their knees to Hitler's security and financial blessings? What if Southern Christians refused to align themselves with hateful racists during the Jim Crow era? What if there was no Civil War—no over 600,000 dead? What if contemporary Christians did not adopt a consumer attitude to Christianity? What if Christians stood with Christ and His values rather than the world's security in culture, finances, power, and politics? Think things would be much different today both with respect to Christ's witness and our world of troubles? Seems like the evils of the prosperity Gospel has been with us for a long time.

Jesus Christ teaches, and history repeatedly demonstrates that no man can worship Mammon (materialism) and God (Matt. 6:24). No man can love God and the world (money, success, power, politics), 1 John 2:15-16. It is not a matter of us inviting Christ into our lives of worldly pursuits. He invites us into His life. He invites us to deny ourselves and share in His life on a daily basis (Luke 9:23). He invites us to a life of sacrificially loving God and loving others (Matt. 22:37-40) regardless of their political position, status, or even attitude toward us (see Matt. 5:44-48). Check out the Example He left us in 1 Pet. 2:17-23.

Thank God that in each of the periods above, there were Christians who resisted the temptations of the world of security, social status, wealth, and power. However, this was only possible by finding their identity, wealth, and security in Jesus Christ as the Great Treasure that transcends the world. Let's make Him and His concerns the issues in life. Let us show the world the beauty of His transcendent love and grace. Let's keep the salt free from contaminates. Let's get the salt into the world.

In His Grace,

Pastor Don